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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: GOR REITERATES REQUIREMENTS FOR FOREIGNERS' ACCESS  
TO CHECHNYA

REF: MOSCOW 6390

Classified By: A/POL Colin Cleary. Reasons 1.4 (b and d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On June 2, Russian security forces issued revised requirements for foreign NGO workers, reporters, and diplomats seeking access to Chechnya. While our contacts acknowledged that they raised the potential for tighter restrictions on NGOs working in the region, they reported that their operations were continuing normally for the moment. With two exceptions, the new guidelines reiterate what have been standard operating procedures and clarify contradictory statements issued by federal and Chechen authorities. END SUMMARY.

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MORE OF THE SAME  
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¶2. (C) The GOR issued revised requirements for NGOs and others working in Chechnya June 2. Signed by Deputy Internal Affairs Minister Colonel-General Yedeleev, the document contains slight changes to the procedures that have governed foreigners' access to Chechnya since 2001, when the UN and the GOR signed a letter of understanding on humanitarian aid distribution in Chechnya. Generally, NGOs, UN expatriate staff, and other foreigners, including U.S. and other diplomats, seeking access to Chechnya must provide advance notice of their plans to the Military Commandant in Chechnya, who in turn coordinates these requests with the Federal Security Service (FSB), and the Chechen Administration. These requests must contain the names and other biographic information, license numbers of vehicles, and detailed itineraries of activities in the republic. Previously, this information was only required for non-Russian citizens, but they now also apply to local staff of NGOs or other aid organizations. Additionally, the new requirements extend the time period for advance notice to ten days from the previous five.

¶3. (C) Our UN and NGO contacts said the release of these requirements did not substantially change procedures already in place. Steven Tull, head of the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Russia (OCHA), told us OCHA had not had any recent complaints about access from NGOs working in the North Caucasus. CARE Canada Country Director Frans Barnard, who occasionally overnights in Grozny, said that the changes were workable; their effect would largely depend on how authorities' chose to enforce them. Some of our contacts said the publication of the requirements would clarify conflicting statements by Chechen and Russian authorities during the spring over the possibility the marshrutniy list requirement would be eliminated.

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MORE TO COME?  
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14. (C) Contacts said that given past harassment of NGOs and oft-repeated rumors that the GOR wanted to remove them from the North Caucasus, there was always the potential that they might further tighten access to Chechnya. GOR officials have created problems for NGOs in the past with seemingly arbitrary and capricious procedures for submitting access requests. They have also occasionally denied access to individual NGOs or severely restricted access for others. In May, for example, the GOR imposed restrictions on aid workers and other foreigners traveling in North Ossetia (reftel), which remain in place. Earlier this month, federal servicemen repeatedly stopped a UN convoy in Chechnya, which included European humanitarian aid experts, and the UNHCR official in charge eventually decided to abandon the mission. Tull said preliminary information suggested the problem had been caused by a newly arrived military commander, but the UN was still awaiting an official explanation. CARE's Barnard said the GOR's re-registration of NGOs in October was an even greater worry for most NGOs at the moment.

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COMMENT

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15. (C) GOR authorities and humanitarian organizations in the North Caucasus have never had an easy relationship, although our contacts recently told us their ability to work in Chechnya seemed to be getting better, not worse. For now, that continues to be the case. GOR attitudes toward the international presence in the North Caucasus have always been sensitive and contradictory, and its intentions hard to discern. We cannot exclude the possibility that NGOs might have difficulty in the future. We will continue to follow the issue closely.

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